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ABSTRACT

This paper (1) examines textbooks in group performance of literature to determine how they describe the use of stage light in production; (2) explicates the four qualities and five functions of stage light; (3) explicates the four structural tensions of a text as defined by J. H. Maclay (1972); (4) considers their application to the production of a short story in performance; and (5) demonstrates (using Carson McCullers' short story "The Sojourner") how the four qualities and five functions of stage light can be used by a director during performance to reinforce and highlight a text's structural tensions. The paper then offers a summary and investigation of potential topics for further research in association with the adaptation and production of literature, such as music and movement. (PRA)

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The Application of Stage Lighting to the Reinforcement of Structural Tensions Within a Narrative Text

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

Producing literature on the stage demands the use of technical elements such as lighting, audio and scenery. But, it is possible that many directors are not using technical elements to their greatest potential to more fully embody the aesthetic and structural dimensions of a text. This essay suggests the potential benefits of considering the medium of stage lighting to reinforce structural tensions within a narrative text. By being aware of the qualities and functions of light a director may bring these elements to bear on the structural tensions within a text to embody more fully its aesthetic dimensions.

This essay will: (1) examine textbooks in group performance of literature to determine how they describe the use of stage light in production, (2) explicate the four qualities and five functions of stage light (Parker, Smith and Wolf, 1985), (3) explicate the four strutural tensions of a text as defined by Maclay (1972), (4) consider their application to the production of a short story in performance, and (5) demonstrate how the four qualities and five functions of stage light can be used by a director during performance to reinforce and highlight the structural tensions. A summary and investigation of potential topics for further research will then be offered, as well as concluding remarks.

Definitions

In this essay, several critical terms will be used that are best defined at the outset.

When discussing structural tensions within a text, I shall use definitions provided by Joanna Hawkins Maclay (1972):

> (1) the tension between showing and telling; (2) the tension between the pastness of the story and the presentness of the telling of that story; (3) the spatial tension between the place where the story occured and the place where the story is being recounted; and (4) the tension created by the juxtaposition of the narrator and the implied author in a given work (156).

All of these tensions are present in any narrative text, and a director can more fully illustrate their importance to the development of a production with stage light.

The function of stage lighting is defined well by Parker, Smith and Wolf (1985):

> Although visibility is the primary concern of stage lighting, the basic obligation of light on the stage is to give the actor or performer meaning in his or her surroundings and to provide an atmosphere in which the role may be logically interpreted. At the same time, stage lighting, like scene designing, has to bring to the audience the full meaning and emotions of the playwright's concept (366).

The last sentence reinforces the belief that stage lighting can be used to more fully embody the dimensions of a text, and that part of its function is to do so.

Textbooks in Group Performance of Literature

In surveying texts that explore the group performance of literature, one finds that a primary concern of many authors is lighting the performers' faces and a secondary concern is

lighting the audience to encourage their involvement in the literature. Yet, so much more can be achieved with light.

Maclay, in her text, Readers Theatre: Towards a Grammar of Practice (1971), states:

> The lighting in a text may be general, such as a general mood, a general time of day, a general place; or the lighting may be particular, such as a train's headlight beam, a bolt of lightning, or a flickering light that indicates Tinker Bell in Peter Pan. The Readers Theatre director and designer would do well to consider these priniciples of general and particular when designing the lighting for a production (64).

Maclay makes a salient point in reference to the effects light can create and illustrates two purposes of light; general illumination and particular or specific illumination. Maclay goes on to describe a specific effect, commenting:

> If the quality, degree of intensity and particularity, and timing of the shift in lighting parallels the emotional shift in the characters, the total impact of the scene can be preserved fully and economically (64).

In this statement, Maclay suggests a third purpose of light, illumination to reinforce specific dimensions of a text as well as its structural tensions, such as those between a narrator and a character.

In his textbook, Chamber Theatre (1978), Breen refers specifically to this application of lighting technology to the production of literature:

> One valuable and special use of lighting in Chamber Theatre concerns the relationship of the narrator to the character. It sometimes happens that a character's being alone is important to the significance of a scene. The narrator's presence on the stage may reduce the effectiveness of the character's isolation. Skillful lighting, however, can include the narrator in the scene

> without destroying the isolation of the character (79).

We see here explicitly that light can do more than illuminate a scene or provide an effect; it can reinforce a structural tension in a text.

According to Kleinau and McHughes in their textbook, Theatres for Literature (1980):

> By its color, and by the rhythm of its mobility, light can enhance and augment the rhythm and intensity of a production. Light in Interpreters Theater can help to stimulate a major mood in the audience and provide an impetus in imaginative participation. Changes in lighting, when nonliteral, can reinforce image changes in the words of the script (277).

Three significant references to the qualities of light are made in this passage: color, mobility, and intensity. All of these qualities will be important in our discussion of the application of lighting technology to the production of prose fiction.

In their textbook, Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature (1982), Coger and White refer to general illumination and specific illumination as well as to Sellman's (1972) five functions of stage lighting. Coger and White take a more technical approach to their discussion of lighting and the group performance of literature, suggesting its great significance: "Many directors believe that light is the most important single factor in production other than the readers and the literature itself (125)."

While many of the insights and suggestions concerning stage lighting in these texts are significant, two problems exist: (1) stage lighting is considered primarily for illumination and

special effects, and (2) no clear principles are given to make other lighting applications.

Textbooks in Lighting

I shall center my discussion on one textbook, Parker, Smith and Wolf's, Scene Design and Stage Lighting (1985). For purposes of this discussion of stage lighting we need be concerned with only two elements; the qualities of light and the functions of light. Parker, Smith and Wolf provide lucid, complete definitions of these elements in language easily understood by those unfamiliar with lighting terminology. Their treatment of the qualities and functions of stage lighting corresponds with the views of Sellman, but in more contemporary language and application.

According to Parker, Smith and Wolf, light has four qualities that can be manipulated:

> Intensity. The first and most obvious quality of light is its intensity or brightness . . .
>
> Distribution. Light rays follow an energy path which is known as distribution. The control of the distribution of light gives it direction and texture as a design feature. The various kinds of distribution begin with the general radiation of direct emanation through the more specific reshaping of the light rays by reflection or optics to the the parallel rays of the laser beam. The sharp or soft-edged quality of the light beam coupled with its degree of brightness give texture to the light itself.
>
> Color. The third property of light is its ability to transmit and reveal color. Color modification and the additive mixing of colored light are two rather basic concepts of color as a quality of light that has to be understood by all designers in the theatre.

> Movement. Movement cannot be categorized as a quality of light, yet its effect upon the theatrical use of color, distribution, and intensity is enormous. While movement implies change, it does not necessarily mean a change in focus or composition; it might be as subtle as the slow color shift from pre-dawn to daybreak (360-362).

Parker, Smith and Wolf next discuss the five functions of stage light:

> Placing the Action. The physical action of a play or any theatrical performance is of prime importance to the lighting designer. We must know where the action has to be clearly seen, half seen, or not seen at all. In following the action, the designer frequently manipulates the intensity and distribution of light.
>
> Visibility. We cannot define visibility as a fixed degree of brightness or an established angle of distribution. It is the amount of light needed for a moment of recognition deemed appropriate for that point of the action in the play.
>
> Establishing the Mood. The overall mood of a play or scene is the next important clue to the lighting designer. A color impression comes from mood, as well as a suggestion of the intensity and distribution of light.
>
> Reinforcing the Theme. The key word here is "reinforcing." Because the visual expression of theme depends on the scene designer's interpretation of the playwright's message, the lighting designer is concerned with compositional revelation of the thematic forms of the setting.
>
> Staging the Story. The movement from scene to scene or from area to area requires logistical planning for the scene designer, while for the lighting designer it is an exercise in control of precise distribution and the delicate intensities of light. Movement or transitions within a scene or from scene to scene by lighting become a connecting or unifying factor in the production (367-369).

Each of these qualities and functions is a tool that a director can use to embody more fully structural tensions as well as all

other dimensions of a text.

THE APPLICATION OF STAGE LIGHTING TO MACLAY'S FOUR STRUCTURAL TENSIONS

Explication of the Four Structural Tensions

Maclay's four structural tensions (1972) are present in every narrative text, and directors must discover methods of embodying them in performance.

The first tension described by Maclay is between showing and telling.

> Frequently, scenes in novels become so dominated by dialogue and "stage directions," for example, that the reader is apt to lose sight of the fact that someone is indeed telling him this story. Yet if a narrator is in a position of always telling his story, when he attempts to create an illusion of showing his story, a certain tension is set up between the controlling narrator who is responsible for all the words in the story and the characters who he allows us to think have "taken over" the movement of the story (156).

The same tension holds true in the performance of a short story. The director has the responsibility to see that the control of the narrator is maintained unless the text calls for another choice. In the words of Maclay:

> The interpreter, if he is true to his committment of embodying the entire text, must demonstrate the simultaniety of showing and telling that is occurring in the text. He has, in other words, the problem of demonstrating how a particular narrator is attempting to tell his story <u>through</u> showing it (156).

The director must find some device to illustrate or reinforce the tension created by the narrator's telling of the story and the

character's showing of the story.

Another responsibility is to the temporal tension between the pastness of a story and the presentness of its telling, as well as the spatial tension between the place where the story occurred and the place where the story is being recounted. These tensions involve the when and where of the characters as the story actually occurred and the when and where of the narrator as he or she recounts the story. In other words:

> All story tellers have what Bertil Romberg calls an "epic situation." That is, a particular time and place in which they are engaged in the activity of telling their stories. But, it is also true that most story tellers are recounting stories which occurred in a different space-time unit. Consequently, there is a tension established between the narrator, who exists in one place at a certain time, and the narrator's story, which usually occupies a different time unit and usually occurs in a different place (156-157).

Careful analysis of a text calls for many questions concerning time and space in relation to narrator and characters. Shifts in time and space during performance must be clear and well motivated. The director must make careful choices in embodying these shifts and use every tool available to make these shifts meaningful to the audience.

The final tension as defined by Maclay is that created by the juxtaposition of a narrator with the implied author. According to Maclay:

> The narrator, of course, is the persona who is the major speaker in a work of narrative literature, and the narrator's audience is a fictive one. On the other hand, every literary work is ultimately spoken by an implied author, the speaker <u>of</u> the work, whose envisioned audience exists in the real world, rather than in a fictional world. The

> problems of characterizing and identifying the speaker, then, become quite complex for the interpreter, whether there be a close identity between the narrator and the implied author, or whether the two be diametrically opposed to each other in their values and judgments. The interpreter must recognize that structural tensions arise not only from the juxtaposition of the narrator and the narrator's story but also from the juxtaposition of the speaker in the work and the speaker of the work (167).

The director faces the same problems as a solo performer in characterizing and identifying the speaker in a text. Ultimately it is the intention of the implied author that is of greatest significance and the director must ensure that the presence of the implied author is felt in the performance. In the words of Maclay:

> These tensions between the narrator's world and values and the implied author's world and values are of major concern to the interpreter; he must face the tasks of assuming his role as speaker in and speaker of the text, relating these roles to these speakers' relationships with the audiences in and of the work, then he must translate these levels of roles and relationships into his situation as an interpreter-as a live, real speaker with his own live, real audience (168).

Again, the director's task is the same as the solo performer's. The director must delineate between the speaker in the text and the speaker of the text, thereby providing the performers with clearcut voices and relationships with which to convey the full dimensionality of the text.

This tension becomes particularly significant when the values and judgments of the narrator and the implied author are in opposition, or when the narrator is unreliable. In this situation the director must call the audience's attention to the

polarity in views between the narrator and the implied author. This is done best, however, by staging the voices in the story. The perception of dramatic irony (i.e., a discrepancy between a speaker's self-knowledge and the author's intention) must occur in the audience and probably accumulates over time.

Each of these structural tensions is present in all texts and every director is faced with the task of embodying these tensions in performance. A fundamental knowledge of the qualities and functions of stage lighting can be very useful in reinforcing these tensions in performance.

Using Stage Lighting to Reinforce Structural Tensions

The qualities and functions of stage lighting can reinforce Maclay's structural tensions in performance. For instance, the tension between showing and telling can work in concert with the qualities of light. Maclay has already warned us "that the reader is apt to lose sight of the fact that someone is indeed telling him this story (156)." The director is aware that the same danger exists for the audience and can look to the qualities of stage light for a remedy.

The distribution of light can be manipulated to focus an audience's attention on either the narrator or characters as necessary. For instance, light can be distributed in such a manner that characters actively showing the story are in the main wash of light while the narrator retires to an adjacent area and stands by in lesser light, thereby maintaining a presence in the story, but allowing the focus to rest on the characters.

The tension between showing and telling could be further reinforced in this hypothetical situation by the intensity of light. When the narrator allows the characters to show his or her story, the brightness of the light on the characters can be increased and the brightness of the light on the narrator can be decreased. Again, the audience's attention will be guided by the manipulation of light.

Another quality of light, color, can also be brought to bear in this situation. By using a different color of light on the characters than on the narrator, tension between the narrator and his or her characters could be further reinforced.

By using any of the above qualities, movement is automatically applied to the situation. Movement is implicit in the use of any of the qualities of light, for movement is a visible change that allows that quality to move to the conscious level of the audience's attention.

Maclay's tensions of time and space can also be reinforced by the functions of stage lighting. As Maclay (1972) has stated:

> There is a tension established between the narrator, who exists in one place at a certain time, and the narrator's story, which usually occupies a different time unit and usually occurs in a different place (157).

The tension in time and space between the narrator's telling of the story and when and where the story actually occurred can call for many shifts in time and space during performance. The use of stage lighting can not only reinforce these tensions, but can also clarify shifts in time and space for the audience.

One of the primary functions of stage lighting is to place

the action. The qualities of light can be manipulated to indicate different locations in time and space onstage. For instance, different intensities, colors and distributions of light can be assigned to two different areas onstage, or one area onstage, to represent two different locations in time or space.

Once the action has been placed onstage, the director has the function of visibility with which to work. If a narrator calls for a character to recall a scene from the past and the character has difficulty recalling the scene, the light used in the scene might be very dim; if the character recalls a scene with glaring vividness, the light used can replicate literally that bright intensity. Visibility refers to more than the audience seeing the performance, or the intensity of light itself; it also aids the director in effectively placing scenes in time and space. Visibility refers to reproducing as literally as possible the environment depicted in the scene.

Inherent in a shift in time and space is often a change of mood. Another of the functions of stage light is establishing mood. All of the qualities of light can come into play in establishing mood. Many times the nonverbal cues of a lighting shift precede the verbal cues given by performers to an audience, and light can speak very eloquently in establishing mood. Color and intensity can be especially effective in establishing the mood and the environment of a scene.

Another tool provided to the director by the functions of stage lighting is the ability to reinforce the theme of the text. The qualities of light can be manipulated to represent

specific locations in time and space, as well as stances of characters and the narrator. By providing nonverbal cues of such data, the audience is aided visually in perceiving the theme of the text, as well as verbally by the performers.

The final function of lighting, staging the story, is very significant to reinforcing or illustrating the structural tension of time and space in a performance. Shifts in time and space can be handled efficiently by the manipulation of the qualities of light, as already described. The director may avoid distracting and time-consuming scenery changes, while smooth transitions in time and space may be employed by staging the story with light. Stage light provides a whole series of options to the director to embody more fully the many dimensions of a text.

The qualities and functions of stage light can be used in any combination to reinforce Maclay's structural tensions between (1) showing and telling; (2) the pastness of a story and the presentness of its telling; and (3) the place where the story occurred and the place where the story is recounted. Because the fourth tension, the juxtaposition of a narrator with the implied author, occurs in the perception of an audience and over time, it is less likely to rely on the specific use of stage lighting.

ILLUSTRATION OF APPLYING STAGE LIGHTING TO PRODUCING PROSE FICTION: "THE SOJOURNER" BY CARSON McCULLERS

In order to explicate more fully the potential that stage

light offers the director in reinforcing Maclay's structural tensions one might consider the short story "The Sojourner" by Carson McCullers (1954).

For the present purposes, the focus will be on the tension between the narrator's showing and telling of the story and how the qualities and functions of stage light can reinforce this tension.

In the text the narrator tells a large portion of the story and appears to be very selective of what is shown by the characters. By maintaining such strict control over the recounting of the story an increased tension exists in the text between the narrator's telling of the story and the characters' showing of the story.

Once the director is aware that the structural tension between telling and showing exists in the text, and what is more, plays a significant part in the recounting of the story, he or she must give proper emphasis to this tension in production. Take for example, the dinner scene in the text:

> Even after Ferris was seated at the table between his host and hostess, the unfinished music still overcast his mood. He was a little drunk.
>
> 'L'improvisation de la vie humaine,' he said. 'There's nothing that makes you so aware of the improvisation of human existence as a song unfinished. Or an old address book.'
>
> 'Address book?' repeated Bailey. Then he stopped, noncommittal and polite.
>
> 'You're still the same old boy, Johnny,' Elizabeth said with a trace of the old tenderness.
>
> It was a Southern dinner that evening, and the dishes were his old favorites. They had fried chicken and corn pudding and rich, glazed candied sweet potatoes. During the meal Elizabeth kept alive a conversation when the silences were overlong. And it came about that Ferris was led to speak of Jeannine.

> 'I first knew Jeannine last autumn--about this time of the year--in Italy. She's a singer and she had an engagement in Rome. I expect we will be married--soon.' The words seemed so true, inevitable, that Ferris did not at first acknowledge to himself the lie. He and Jeannine had never in that year spoken of marriage. And indeed, she was still married--to a White Russian moneychanger in Paris from whom she had been seperated for five years. But it was too late to correct the lie. Already Elizabeth was saying: 'This really makes me glad to know. congratulations, Johnny.'
>
> He tried to make amends with truth. 'The Roman autumn is so beautiful. Balmy and blossoming.' He added, 'Jeannine has a little boy of six. A curious trilingual little fellow. We go to the Tuileries sometimes.'
>
> A lie again. He had taken the boy once to the gardens. The sallow foreign child in shorts that bared his spindly legs had sailed his boat in the concrete pond and ridden the pony. The child had wanted to go in to the puppet show. But there was not time, for Ferris had an engagement at the Scribe Hotel. He had promised they would go to the guignol another afternoon. Only once had he taken Valentin to the Tuileries (343-344).

The director might consider first the functions of stage lighting and determine their application to this passage.

One directorial concern is placing the action, as several different scenes are presented by the narrator and he or she frequently steps in and out of scene commenting on the actions of the characters. The narrator's space for telling the story and the character's space for showing the story may be delineated with light, and the narrator can then move back and forth between the areas as called for by the text.

For instance, the stage could be lit with two pools of light. One large area stage left contains a table and three chairs. Performers playing Ferris, Elizabeth, and Bailey are seated in the chairs. Ferris is seated up center, Elizabeth is

seated stage right and Bailey is seated stage left. The narrator stands in a smaller pool of light stage right. The narrator begins the first paragraph of narration standing in his or her area of light. On the last line of the first paragraph, "He was a little drunk," the narrator then gestures towards Ferris, allowing the performer to "take over" the story. In large sections of narration, such as the description of the dinner ("It was a southern dinner that evening..."), the narrator could cross over into the character's light. On the line, "And it came about that Ferris was led to speak of Jeannine," the narrator could cross back into his or her area allowing the characters to resume the story.

The function of visibility also offers some interesting possibilites for reinforcing the tension between showing and telling. For instance, in the passage Ferris tells two lies which the narrator verifies as untrue. The quality of light on Ferris can be manipulated as he tells the lies and on the narrator as he or she verifies the lies to allow the function of visibility to reinforce the tension between what the character reveals in showing and what the narrator reveals in telling.

The third function of stage light, establishing the mood, also offers potential to the director. Many moods and shifts in moods are present in the text. Light might very effectively reinforce the mood of each scene as well as individual character's moods. To refer back to the previous example of Ferris' lies, his change in mood as he tells the lies can be denoted with a change in light.

As an example to illustrate both the functions of visibility and establishing mood, as Ferris tells the first lie, "I expect we will be married soon", a special light on Ferris could be raised in intensity. In addition, a pinkish or very light red gel could be used in this instrument to indicate the lie. As the narrator verifies the lie, the light on the narrator's area could be raised in intensity.

The next function of stage light, reinforcing the theme, is of particular relevance to this story. A key theme in the text is Ferris' lack of control over his life and the resulting anxiety. This theme parallels the very tension discussed in this section. Though Ferris is allowed to show the story, it is the narrator who is truly in control. The structural tension to be reinforced parallels a key theme in the story.

The last function, staging the story, can certainly be applied to this task. In staging "The Sojourner" it is desirable to emphasize the tension between the narrator's telling of the story and the character's showing of the story. It is possible to use light not only to stage the story physically but also to stage this structural tension. The narrator offers several scenes in different locations in recounting this story as well as narrative discourse. Specific areas can be delineated by light for showing and telling. While the narrator would be allowed to move back and forth between these areas, the characters would not. It would also be possible for the narrator to provide nonverbal cues (such as finger snapping) synchronized with lighting cues before characters would be allowed to begin to show

a scene.

The previous example explicating the function of placing the action also serves to illustrate this point. One area is defined by light for the narrator to tell the story and another for the characters to show the story. As the narrator ends his or her discourse, a gesture is made to indicate the character refered to. The gesture gives permission for the character to begin showing the story. The significance of the gesture could be increased by raising the intensity of the light on the characters and lowering the light on the narrator.

As the concern in this instance is explicating Maclay's structural tension between showing and telling it might be useful to continue this discussion of staging the story, looking specifically at the qualities of light, and using the scene already alluded to from the text.

The stage could be lit with two pools of light (distribution). A large pool of light stage left contains a table and three chairs. Performers playing Ferris, Elizabeth and Bailey are seated in the chairs. Ferris is seated up center, Elizabeth is seated stage right and Bailey is seated stage left. The narrator stands in a smaller pool of light stage right. The narrator is in the present, telling the story and the characters are in the past, showing the story; therefore, the narrator's light could have more intensity than the characters light. In addition, a warmer color of light (e.g., straw or bastard amber) could be used on the narrator's area and the character's area could be lit with a cooler color (e.g., light blue or steel

blue).

The first paragraph of the passage is narrative discourse. The narrator could use this paragraph to move into the characters' area and as he or she moved, the intensity on the narrator's area could be lowered and the character's area intensity could be increased (movement). Within one paragraph of the passage, all four qualities of light have been used and each has functioned to stage the story and reinforce the structural tension between showing and telling.

The quality of movement is implied by the other qualities of stage light. While change in intensity, color and distruibution imply movement, the quality can also be used in a literal sense. Light can move with a character or narrator, whether by followspot or by crossfading from one area to another, and in addition, distribution, color and intensity can change with such a move. For instance, as the narrator moves back and forth between telling the story and allowing the character to show the story, light can move with the narrator. The qualities and functions of stage light can be used in any combination desired by the director to accomplish the tasks required by a text.

CONCLUSION

Summary

The purposes of this essay have been (1) to explicate the four structural tensions of a text as defined by Maclay (1972), (2) to explicate the four qualities and five functions of stage light

(Parker, Smith and Wolf, 1985), (3) to consider their application to the production of a short story in performance, and (4) to demonstrate how the four qualities and five functions of stage light can be used by a director during performance to reinforce and highlight these structural tensions.

Call for Further Research

This essay raises a number of questions to be investigated. Elements of technical theater are generally applied to a production after a script is completed. There exists the potential for an adapter to consider technical elements during the adapting process to resolve questions that arise in preparing a text for production.

The adapter must consider such questions as: To whom will lines be assigned, what material is to be cut to fit the performance frame, what is the narrative point of view, and what is the form and structure of the story? By answering such questions the adapter explicates a text and is then faced with the task of preparing a script for performance embodying as fully as possible the dimensions of the text. It is likely that stage lighting could assist the adapter during the adaptation process, rather than being plugged into the production after the script is completed.

Furthermore, additional technical elements such as scenery, audio and film and video projections could also be applied to Maclay's structural tensions.

This essay revolved around a short story. Yet to be

examined is the application of stage light to novels, poetry and other nondramatic literary forms.

While stage lighting exists in the realm of producion technology, this essay has approached the subject on a nontechnical level. This same subject could also be approached from a more technical standpoint.

Finally, other non-textual theatrical elements, such as music and movement remain to be researched in association with the adaptation and production of literature.

Concluding Statement

The suggestions made within this essay are but a few of the possibilities for the use of the qualities and functions of light in producing literature for the stage. Each director is limited only by his or her own imagination. The potential for using stage light is limitless once the concepts are realized and applied to the questions at hand in a given story.

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